

PUBLIC SHADE TREE COMMITTEE

Fiscal Year 2008

Members: Hope Crolius, Chair; Robert Erwin; William Hutchinson, Secretary; Dennis Ryan; Diana Stein (Select Board Liaison); Otto Stein (Conservation Commission Liaison). Tree Warden: Alan Snow

The Shade Tree Committee enjoyed a year of renewed commitment to drawing the public into becoming aware of the critical role that trees play in the health and beauty of our town. As “green infrastructure,” it is this Committee’s position that public shade trees deserve equal attention and municipal commitment as roads, public water supplies, and other critical functions (public trees being those that grow along roads and sidewalks, benefiting all, and which fall under the jurisdiction of the Tree Warden under MGL Chapter 87).

The succession of Alan Snow as Tree Warden in the summer of 2007 (following 38 years of service by Stanley Ziomek) is behind this new vigor. One of Mr. Snow’s first goals is to completely revise and update the Town Tree Policy. This was achieved, with much input by APSTC members and some worthy “borrowing” from other municipalities’ effective tree policies. As of this writing, the Tree Policy is being reviewed by Town Counsel. As it begins to be applied, it is our intention that property owners, Town tree crews, tree care companies, construction companies, and others who tend to and work near public trees are clear that protection of this public resource is a priority. For example, many trees in Amherst are dying quick or drawn-out deaths following construction that cuts into their root systems. There are many ways to prevent this, and a consultation with the Tree Warden prior to the project can do this.

The APSTC has many people to thank for their support over the past, successful year. The new Town Manager Laurence Shaffer has been present at several of our monthly meetings, attended our events, and seems to always have a place on his schedule to talk about ideas. Coming from Keene, New Hampshire, Mr. Shaffer was present in that college city when Keene made an expensive and publicly-supported commitment to “green” its downtown. In May, he organized a roadtrip to Keene for our residents who wanted to see what Amherst could look like with a similar initiative. Conservation Department Administrative Assistant Libby Lass has been invaluable in helping the APSTC with many details, as has Conservation Director David Ziomek. The DPW’s Tree Services Director Dan LaFountain showed up on Arbor Day with the bucket lift truck that tree crews go up in and gave rides into the treetops for children. The Amherst Rotary Club donated \$5,000 to plant a variety of species along North Pleasant Street. And several people at UMass and Amherst College have done much to further support of trees by the APSTC.

Still, we are just at the beginning. Although it has been recognized as a TreeCity USA by the Arbor Day Foundation for 21 years, all the work to meet the criteria for this designation has been entirely by volunteers. Amherst has not had a budget for planting new trees (or following up with their care in the critical first three years) for decades. Sadly, Amherst has lost *more than 1,000 public shade trees* since 1998! This figure does not include trees cut down on private land. This is an unsustainable situation, and the solution is to fund and care for “large-maturing” trees that will provide canopy cover for decades to come (as opposed to smaller ornamental trees, which have an important secondary role to play). The FY 08 budget for the tree crew was about \$124,000. It is the hope of this Committee that the budget be expanded so that this hardworking

crew has the time, resources and personnel to devote not only to tree removal, but to watering, mulching, purchasing, and planting young trees.

The budget for this Committee is zero, save for costs of printing information and the valuable time of the Conservation Department. The Tree Warden works as a volunteer. Since assuming the post, Mr. Snow estimates that he puts in approximately 15 hours a week doing hazard tree risk assessments, attending meetings (for projects such as getting UMass designated as a TreeCampus USA, making presentations to the Girl Scouts, and monthly APSTC meetings), serving as liaison to the Kendrick Park Committee, organizing the new Amherst Neighborhood Tree Stewards program. A very rough estimate of volunteer hours by members of the APSTC over the past year is well over 1,000. (In filling out a form for the Massachusetts Tree Wardens Association recently, we learned that this organization's formula is to value volunteer time at \$10 per hour -- which would mean the contribution of Shade Tree Committee members to Amherst would be \$10,000.)

Among the achievements by the APSTC in FY 08 were:

- Arbor Day 2008, on April 27, attended by several hundred people;
- The Amherst Neighborhood Tree Stewards program (ANTS), a group of volunteers to help inventory existing trees and plant and care for new ones;
- The "250 for 250" tree project, in which residents, schools, and organizations are being asked to purchase a young tree and plant it within 20 feet of the public right-of-way. We are selling 250 trees in honor of the town's semiquincentennial;
- Joined the Alliance for Community Trees, a nonprofit that supports shade tree groups around the country;
- Attended an awards ceremony in Wellesley to receive recognition for maintaining TreeCity USA status for 21 years;
- To learn what other towns and cities are doing to expand their "urban forest," Ms. Crolius traveled, in May, to Orlando, Florida, to take part in the 2008 Conference on Urban Ecosystems. She brought back many excellent ideas that are already being implemented all over the country.

Respectfully submitted,

Hope Crolius, Chair, Amherst Public Shade Tree Committee